



IMPACT AND RESPONSIBILITY WITH AN EFFECTIVE SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

Pihlajalinna is developing its Occupational Health service content in an increasingly impactful direction. As part of this development, we have prepared a recommended sickness absence policy for our client organisations. The recommended policy includes a minimum recommendation for short sickness absences based on best practices as well as clear responsibility distribution guidelines for supporting employees' ability to work.

Our client organisations incur costs related to incapacity for work and sickness absences from at least four sources:

- absence from work decreases productivity
- sickness absences lead to replacement arrangement costs
- sick leave wage costs
- increased occupational health costs due to the use of occupational health services

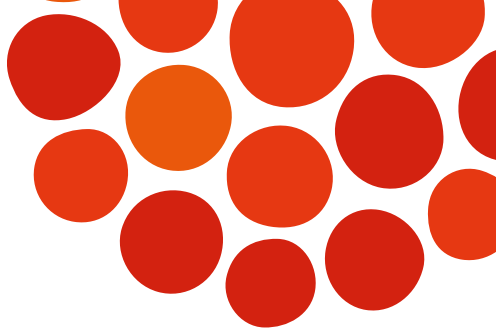
EFFECTIVE BY-PERMISSION POLICY ENABLES SICKNESS ABSENCE ALTERNATIVES

Close communication with a supervisor supports the success of work ability management and makes it possible to address work ability challenges in a comprehensive manner. The employer's early support model plays a key role here. Employees' work ability is supported through discussion and mutual trust. The occupational health team helps the employer implement the early support model by, for example, supporting supervisory work and providing information to support decision-making.

Distribution of duties at occupational health:

- work ability risks are assessed by the employer's own occupational health team
- health counselling and self-care support are primary means of support
- musculoskeletal problems are treated by a physiotherapist
- mental health problems are addressed by an occupational health nurse, occupational psychologist or the Worry in Mind mental health line
- a physician's appointment is booked if the person needs a physician's opinion, for example, for a sickness absence of more than 10 days





“An absence granted by a supervisor is good work ability management. It also enables occupational health to provide timely treatment and care when employees use the services based on their symptoms and not the need to obtain a sick note.”

Henni Hyytiä-Ilmonen, Chief Occupational Health Physician


In addition to our client organisations' work ability risks, Pihlajalinna is concerned about health care resources and, in particular, the correct distribution of duties among our health care personnel. We help sick people and offer high-quality medical care to those who need it. The employer's policy to allow short sickness absences is a separate scheme, in which the employer is the specialist. By encouraging work ability discussions to be held at the workplace, we provide the employer with tools to plan sickness absence alternatives and free up medical resources for those who really need treatment. Simultaneously, we also save occupational health costs for medical care.

Many employers have applied more flexible models and broader by-permission policies for short absences than this recommendation. Our experiences of these organisations have been encouraging. Furthermore, according to studies, supervisory work appears to be key to cutting the sickness absence rate.

NEED AND RESPONSIBILITY AS GUIDING LIGHTS

Responding to actual needs is at the heart of the policy of Pihlajalinna Occupational Health. A supervisor must approach an employee immediately when a work ability risk is identified. This is also a prerequisite for allowing the employee to be absent from work. An employee should be allowed to rest or receive help for their symptoms without worrying about their livelihood. Kela requires a medical certificate for absences of more than 10 days to evaluate the grounds for the payment of a daily sickness allowance.

Based on these needs and our social security system, it is safe to say that health care services are generally not needed for absences of less than 10 days. One of the most common reasons why employees contact occupational health is an upper respiratory tract infection. These symptoms are usually easy to treat at home. Often, the reason for the visit to a clinic is the need for a sick note. A written sick note is valid for less than 3 days and, therefore, these appointments are unnecessary. We recommend an absence policy that allows employees to be absent for at least 5 days with a supervisor's permission. If the employer requires a medical certificate after the 5 days have passed, the certificate is provided by a nurse or, for musculoskeletal problems, an occupational physiotherapist.

If an employee does not know whether their symptoms impact their general health or, for example, in the event of an accident that requires an assessment of the need for care, the employee should consult occupational health regardless of the absence. The absence policy enables timely treatment when the appointment is booked based on the need for medical care and not according to the certificate date. 

SYSTEMATIC MANAGEMENT OF WORK ABILITY RISKS THROUGH COOPERATION

We recommend discussing the employer's sickness absence policy and early support model together with employee representatives and human resources management. Supervisors should be trained to use the model and address work ability challenges. Your own occupational health team is happy to help you with planning an effective model and its implementation. All our client organisations are welcome to use Pihlajalinna's recommended sickness absence model as a basis for their own policies free of charge.

The aim of this recommendation is to encourage our client organisations to reinforce an open culture of dialogue and trust at the workplace and improve the management of incapacity for work in the long term. If you would like to update your organisation's sickness absence policy, please contact your designated occupational health nurse. Let us take care of your organisation's work ability together.

Pihlajalinna Occupational Health

Pihlajalinna Occupational Health's recommended sickness absence policy:

Employer's tools:

- Absence by a supervisor's permission: 1–5 days
- Temporary work arrangements
- Alternative work

Occupational health's tools:

- Nurse's recommendation for absence +1–5 days, also by phone
- Occupational physiotherapist +1–5 days, only at the clinic
- Physician 10+ days (chat service max. 10 days)
- Contact with the designated occupational health team no later than after 20 days



More information:

[Occupational physiotherapist's self-referral appointment](#)

Topic in media:

[Puulo introduced a revolutionary sick leave policy](#)